

Community participation in integrated child development services programme in rural Punjab

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ABSTRACT

Realizing the great importance of bringing improvement in children and women's health and nutritional status, Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme was launched on 2nd October 1975. The scope of present study is to evaluate the community participation in ICDS programme. In order to achieve the objectives of the present study, all three ICDS project: Barnala, Sehna and Mehal Kalan of the Barnala District of Punjab were selected for the study. A total of 30 villages (10 from each ICDS project) were selected on the basis of random. From each village Anganwadi Worker and village Sarpanch were selected for study. Thus a total of 30 Anganwadi Workers and 30 Villages Sarpanch was in the sample, from all 30 villages which were having Anganwadi for at least the last 25 years. It was disappointing to find that a majority (76.66%) of the AWWs did not receive any help from anyone in running the AWCs at village level. Half of the village Sarpanches did not make any contribution to the AWWs. It was also found that a majority (66.66%) of the village Sarpanches did not visit the AWCs at all. All (100%) village Sarpanches answered that there was no local committee formed to help the AWWs to conduct different activities and nor any organization like youth club or village school teachers or voluntary organizations at the village level to help the AWWs. In this regard, it is recommended that the training of project ICDS functionaries should be strengthened to impart them specific skills to elicit community participation and also need to have a short duration preparation phase to raise awareness of the community regarding ICDS services.

Keywords: ICDS, AWW, AWC, NIPCCD, PEO

Realizing the great importance of bringing improvement in children and women's health and nutritional status, Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme was launched on 2nd October 1975, on the auspicious occasion of the 106th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation. Government of India initiated an integrated approach for the delivery of health care

as well as nutrition and education services at the village level through Anganwadi Centres (AWCs). ICDS is one of the flagship programmes of the Government of India and represents one of the world's largest and unique programmes for early childhood care as well as women etc. In the initial stages ICDS was implemented in 33 selected community development blocks all over India. ICDS has expanded considerably in subsequent years and Up to 31st March 2013; ² there are 7076 sanctioned projects, 7025 operational projects in India. In Punjab ICDS program has expanded very rapidly. At present, there are 155 sanctioned and 154 operational projects.³ Vijay Rattan⁴ is his book (1997) gave details about genesis, growth, components of ICDS and described a package of seven services comprising supplementary nutrition, immunization, health check-ups, and referral services' treatment of illness, Nutrition and health education and non-formal pre-school education which are provided under ICDS.

ICDS is basically a community based programme and its success depends on active Panchayat and community participation. The most significant feature of ICDS is to improve the capabilities of the parents to take care of the child and thus involve the community by encouraging self-help in improving the quality of life and wellbeing of the child and family. ICDS has been envisaged and conceptualized as a community based programme. It calls for community participation in its process of implementation by utilizing local resources. ICDS lays great emphasis for bringing about social change in the community and its objectives are not confined to delivery of services only. This is reflected in heightened awareness, change in attitude, beliefs and practices. The choice of having anganwadi workers (AWWs) at the grass-roots level as a voluntary worker and not a paid functionary makes it a scheme of the people. The assumption is that the Anganwadi worker, being a local woman, would be much more effective in delivery of services due to familiarity with the community. This would facilitate acceptance of the programme and the participation in it⁵. Despite the built-in element of community participation, ICDS in over approximately four decade of its operation has not been able to involve the community to the desired level. Most of the studies have indicated that the beneficiaries have less awareness about the scheme,⁶ its components and possible benefits they can derive from it. The participation of the community has been observed to be marginal or low. Only a few isolated individuals come forward to contribute in the programme. The total involvement of the community, its voluntary organizations and other local groups has not taken place as envisaged in most of cases. Though the project staff has received training in soliciting community participation, yet Supervisors and Child Development Project Officers (CDPOs), by and large, were unable to provide the desired support and guidance in involving the community⁷. Their skills in mobilizing the community have been found to be inadequate. Community participation in ICDS programme is important for the smooth functioning of the programme, it increases its utilization,

accounts for success and failure, reduce government intervention and create sense of ownership as well as sensitivity of the programme. A lot of work has been carried on the participation of Panchayat in ICDS and it has been found that community leaders were not aware of ICDS services and did not spare time and work outside the household for long hours⁸. The study conducted by Nayer et. al. (1999) revealed that 53.3% provided free accommodation for AWC and 42.6% assisted in implementing health activities and contributed in terms of raw food for supplementary nutrition and fuel for cooking⁹. In the background of these observations, it is very important to investigate the community participation in the world's largest and most unique ICDS programme. So, this field study carried out in the Barnala district of Punjab.

Scope and Objectives

The scope of present study is to evaluate the community participation in ICDS programme in all three ICDS Project namely Barnala, Sehna and Mehal Kalan of Barnala district of Punjab. In this study community participation in ICDS programme had been evaluated in the light of the following objectives:

1. Assess the actual extent of sarpanches participation and involvement in ICDS programme.
2. Evaluate the involvement of youth clubs/ school teachers/ voluntary organizations in smooth running of the programme.
3. Recommend strategies to enhance community participation in ICDS Programme.

Methodology

In order to achieve the objectives of the present study, all three ICDS project: Barnala, Sehna and Mehal Kalan of the Barnala District of Punjab were selected for the study. The study was conducted during August to December 2012. A total of 30 villages (10 from each ICDS project) were selected on the basis of random. From each village Anganwadi Worker and village Sarpanch were selected for study. Thus a total of 30 Anganwadi Workers and 30 Villages Sarpanch was in the sample, from all 30 villages which were having Anganwadi for at least the last 25 years. These Anganwadi Workers and Villages Sarpanches were interviewed by using interview schedule consisting of close ended question. Schedule were designed in English and for the convenience of the respondents it were translated in Punjabi which is common language spoken in the Barnala district. Besides this, secondary sources of information like books, articles, and newspaper clippings, articles in research journals, websites and reports were also consulted to collect the factual data concerning the study. The data from the total sample of 30 Anganwadi

Workers and 30 Villages Sarpanch was edited. The data collected was analyzed manually and tabulated.

Findings of the Study

Keeping in view the specific objective, personal interviews with Anganwadi Workers and Village Sarpanches were conducted. The results are presented in tabular form below. First two Tables are based on the responses of Anganwadi Workers and table numbers three to six are related to the responses of Village Sarpanches. The findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Who, among the following have helped you in running the Anganwadi Centres?

(Anganwadi Workers)

Attributes	Responses			Responses of Total AWWs
	Barnala ICDS Project	Sehna ICDS Project	Mehal Kalan ICDS Project	
Beneficiaries mothers	----	----	----	-----
Village Panchayats	01(10)	02(20)	04(40)	07(23.33)
Community leaders	-----	-----	-----	-----
Not any one	09(90)	08(80)	06(60)	23(76.66)
Total	10	10	10	30(100)

Source: Culled from Primary data. Figures in brackets are percentages.

Table 2: Do you face any problem in involving community in the Anganwadi activities? If yes, what is the problem?

(Anganwadi Workers)

Attributes	Responses			Responses of Total AWWs
	Barnala ICDS Project	Sehna ICDS Project	Mehal Kalan ICDS Project	
Indifferent attitude of community	04(40)	05(50)	05(50)	14(46.66)
Superstitious beliefs	03(30)	-----	----	03(10.00)
People have no time	----	04(40)	02(20)	06(20.00)
Did not face any problem	03(30)	01(10)	03(30)	07(23.33)
Total	10	10	10	30(100)

Source: Culled from Primary data. Figures in brackets are percentages.

The ICDS programme has been envisaged and conceptualized as a community based programme. The starting point for community participation is an appointment of a local woman as AWW. Further, efforts are being made to mobilise community support through involvement of Village Panchayats, beneficiary women and other community leaders. The data presented in the Table 1 clearly explains that a high majority (76.66%) of the AWWs did not receive any help from anyone in running the AWCs. The rest 23.33% of the AWWs received help from Village Panchayat in running the AWC's. It shows that the performance of community participation in ICDS activities is below expectation and insufficient.

The question regarding the problems faced by the AWWs to involve the community in the Anganwadi activities, as given in Table 2, found that 46.66% of AWWs considered indifferent attitude of community towards Anganwadi activities as the main problem; about 20% of the AWWs said that people did not have any time to take part in Anganwadi activities as the main problem; while 10% of AWWs replied that superstitious beliefs among the community was the main problem. Only 23.33% of the AWWs did not face any problem regarding involvement of community in the Anganwadi activities.

It was sad to find that a majority (76.66%) of AWWs faced various problems regarding involvement of community in the Anganwadi activities. It is not very encouraging.

Now, the discussion shifts to the Village Sarpanches.

Table 3: Have you in any way contributed to the cause of Anganwadi centre? If yes, how?

(Village Sarpanches)

Attributes	Responses			Responses of Total Sarpanches
	Barnala ICDS Project	Sehna ICDS Project	Mehal Kalan ICDS Project	
Yes, Getting space for AWCs	03(30)	04(40)	05(50)	12(40)
Yes, Storage facilities for ration	----	01(10)	-----	01(3.33)
Yes, Motivate the community	02(20)	----	-----	02(6.66)
No, Did not contribute	05(50)	05(50)	50(50)	15(50)
Total	10	10	10	30(100)

Source: Culled from Primary data. Figures in brackets are percentages.

The original concept of the ICDS programme was to make it a people’s programme, eventually becoming the most important programme for mothers and children at the grass-root level where the contribution from the community specially village sarpanch, had more relevance than in any other similar programme. The question regarding the nature of the contribution from Village Sarpanch is presented in table 3. It was sad to find that half (50%) village Sarpanches did not make any contribution to the AWWs due to petty reasons like AWWs did not ask him for help, lack of time with Sarpanches and they did not know in what way they could contribute to the AWCs. The rest 50% of village Sarpanches gave contribution to the AWWs. Out of them, 40% village Sarpanches made efforts and got space for AWCs, two (3.33%) village Sarpanches arranged for storage facilities to store the ration and equipment while some (6.66%) Village Sarpanches motivated the community to send their children at AWCs. It is heartening to find that at least half of the Village Sarpanches made efforts to further of AWCs.

Success of ICDS programme also depends on regular visits of village Sarpanches at AWCs. In Table 4, the extent of involvement of Sarpanch in the activities of the AWCs is indicated. Only one third (33.33%) village Sarpanches claimed that they visited regularly the AWCs. Out of them, 23.33% of village Sarpanches reported that they observed the activities of AWCs. Some (6.66%) Sarpanches answered that they solved the problems of the AWWs, and merely one (3.33) village Sarpanch replied that he talked to the ICDS beneficiaries about their problems.

Table 4: Do you visit Anganwadi centre? If yes, what do you do at the Anganwadi?

(Village Sarpanches)

Attributes	Responses			Responses of Total Sarpanches
	Barnala ICDS Project	Sehna ICDS Project	Mehal Kalan ICDS Project	
Yes, I observe the Anganwadi activities	03(30)	02(20)	02(20)	07(23.33)
Yes, I solve the problems of Anganwadi workers	01(10)	01(10)	-----	02(06.66)
Yes, I talk to ICDS beneficiaries	-----	01(10)	-----	01(03.33)
I do not visit Anganwadi	06(60)	06(60)	08(80)	20(66.66)
Total	10	10	10	30(100)

Source: Culled from Primary data. Figures in brackets are percentages.

It was extremely disappointing to find that a majority (66.66%) of the village Sarpanches did not make any visit at all to the AWCs, Thus, the participation of the village Sarpanches in ICDS activities was very pathetic. Only some Sarpanches came forward to make effective participation in the ICDS programmes.

Table 5: Are there any local committees formed to help the activities of the Anganwadi?

(Village Sarpanches)

Attributes	Responses			Responses of Total Sarpanches
	Barnala ICDS Project	Sehna ICDS Project	Mehal Kalan ICDS Project	
Yes	----	----	----	----
No	10(100)	10(100)	10(100)	30(100)
Do not know	2	----	----	----
Any other	----	----	----	----
Total	10	10	10	30(100)

Source: Culled from Primary data. Figures in brackets are percentages.

Table 6: Are there any other organization and school teachers at local level which help the Anganwadi activities? If yes, name the organization.

(Village Sarpanch)

Attributes	Responses			Responses of Total Sarpanches
	Barnala ICDS Project	Sehna ICDS Project	Mehal Kalan ICDS Project	
Yes, Youth Club	----	----	----	-----
Yes, School teacher	----	----	----	-----
Yes, Voluntary Organizations	----	----	----	-----
Not helped by any organization	10(100)	10(100)	10(100)	30(100)
Total	10	10	10	30(100)

Source: Culled from Primary data. Figures in brackets are percentages.

Anganwadi Centre is the focal point for delivery of services to the community. Therefore, local committee at the village level is very important for the participation of community in ICDS programme. As per norms, AWWs, ANMs, local influential people, social workers and elected representatives of Panchayati Raj institutions should normally be included in the local committee. Replying to the question about the formation of local committee at village level, as Table 5 describes, shockingly, all (100%) village Sarpanches answered that they did not form any local committee to help the AWWs.

On this count, it was depressing to find that over a period of three and half decades to implement the ICDS programme, not a single local committee was formed to support the AWWs.

Participation of different organizations at the grass-root level is the cornerstone for success of any development programme. A programme like ICDS cannot achieve a lasting success if it does not have some in built mechanism for involving the organization like youth club, village school teachers and voluntary organizations at local level in planning, implementation and monitoring services. As Table 6 explains, it was again shocking to note that all (100%) village Sarpanches of the selected sample confessed that there was no organization like youth club or village school teachers and voluntary organization at the village level to help the AWWs to conduct the activities of AWCs. It seems that different organizations did not have proper knowledge and awareness about their role in ICDS programme.

Discussion

Community's active participation is the key to the success of a social and development programme which is aimed to bring about a change in the life of the people. But under the present study, it was disappointing to find that a majority (76.66%) of the AWWs did not receive any help from anyone in running the AWCs at village level. Half of the village Sarpanches did not make any contribution to the AWWs due to various petty reasons like AWWs did not ask them for help, lack of time of Sarpanches and they did not know in what way they could contribute to the different activities of AWCs. It was also found that a majority (66.66%) of the village Sarpanches did not visit the AWCs at all. All (100%) village Sarpanches answered that there was no local committee formed to help the AWWs to conduct different activities and again all (100%) village Sarpanches admitted that there was no organization like youth club or village school teachers or voluntary organizations at the village level to help the AWWs. The level of community participation in ICDS programme is better in different states of India to compare the present study. As PEO (2011)10 in 35 states and UTs found that an average, 40 per cent of the AWC received help from the Panchayat, 31.1 per cent of the AWC received help from village leaders/committee, 37.1 per cent of the

AWWs got help from women's groups and 48.4 per cent of the AWWs got help from the mothers of the beneficiary children. NIPCCD (2006)¹¹ in 35 states and UTs also reported that more than 70 percent projects of rural areas were having Coordination Committee at the project level. Majority (69.7 %) of community leaders extended their contribution to AWCs and (32.4%) women (15-45 years) mainly extended supportive role in Anganwadies like assistance in cooking food, providing fuel, collecting children for health checkup, bringing children to Anganwadis for immunisation, fetching drinking water etc. In contrast to the present study, Seema (2001)¹² in Kerala pointed out that in 85% of the AWWs, formal and local-level patron committers were in existence but community participation in ICDS activities was more formal than real.

Conclusion

The picture is gloomy there is an urgent need to make strong efforts to mobilize community support, which should be freely available if a strong policy for this is adopted. In this regard, it is recommended that the training of project functionaries should be strengthened to impart them specific skills to elicit community participation. The State Government should motivate and give guidelines to all local body representatives to spent 15% of their area welfare allotment fund for the ICDS programme, to improve infrastructure and maintenance of the centres. There is need to have a short duration preparation phase to raise awareness of the community regarding ICDS services, and the benefits that the community could derive from the programme before launching the scheme in that area. The ICDS package should be made flexible to meet needs of the community.

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